

18TH DISTRICT REPORT

ON THE 2003 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



SEN. JOE ZARELLI



REP. TOM MIELKE



REP. ED ORCUTT

September 2003

Dear Friends,

This past session was a long and challenging one, filled with successes and disappointments. This newsletter highlights some of the things accomplished by the 2003 Legislature.

First, we want you to know that one of the most important principles guiding each of us this year reflects what many of you have told us: **NO NEW TAXES!**

We entered the 2003 session with a record \$2.6 billion budget deficit, caused by years of irresponsible and unsustainable budgeting coupled with a struggling economy. Plugging that hole without raising taxes proved to be difficult, but not impossible!

In the Senate, Republican budget writers, led in part by Ways & Means Vice-chair Sen. Zarelli, worked with committee chairs to identify areas where budgets could be trimmed to fund the greatest number of priorities within limited revenue (and without a general tax increase). House Republicans joined in to hold the line against several tax increases proposed by their Democrat counterparts. The result was a budget solution that avoided draconian cuts in vital social services while realigning the state's spending priorities.

The second guiding principle we followed is reflected in these simple questions we used to gauge the importance of legislation: "Does this bill move the economy forward – or does it move it backward? Does it save the state money – or does it cost the state money? Will this measure help businesses create jobs – or prevent job growth in our state?"

At each decision point, we remembered how these two principles shone through in the many letters, phone calls, e-mails and faxes we received from 18th District residents. Your participation and encouragement consistently let us know we were on the right track! We greatly appreciate your involvement and sincerely thank you for your input.

In your service,

Sen. Joseph Zarelli

Rep. Tom Mielke

Rep. Ed Orcutt

LEANER STATE BUDGET PROTECTS CRITICAL SERVICES WITHOUT NEW TAXES

This year the Legislature was required to write a new state operating budget, to pay for things like education and social and health services in 2003-05. The cost of automatically maintaining the range and level of public services available would have left the state \$2.7 billion short. We had two choices: raise taxes or reduce services to an affordable level. We ultimately agreed on a budget balanced **without a tax increase**.

The compromise budget allocates a little more than \$23 billion for state government operations in 2003-05. That's just 2 percent larger than the 2001-03 budget – the smallest growth from one budget to the next in **at least 40 years** in our state.

Besides holding the line on taxes, the budget that took effect July 1 focuses on priorities. It protected health coverage for 100,000 low-income families, which is 40,000 more families than the governor's proposed budget would have covered. The budget avoided drastic cuts in services for developmentally disabled and troubled children. It protects health care services for children living at up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and provides a 75-cent-per-hour pay raise for home health care workers.

It's probably the most responsible budget we've seen in years. Does it do everything we wanted? Absolutely not. But it is a good-faith step forward in addressing the concerns of our citizens. Economic conditions have forced families and employers across Washington to focus on the essentials and tighten their belts. Now government will do the same.

NEWS FROM SEN. ZARELLI

“FELONY MURDER FIX” PUTS VIOLENT CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS

Last year, the State Supreme Court overstepped its bounds by ruling that the crime of “assault” could not be used as a precursor to a “felony murder” charge. This injustice could set several murderers in this state free - most of them baby killers - and make it extremely difficult for prosecutors to put away certain violent criminals.

As a result, I sponsored SB 5001 to specifically clarify the existing statute and ensure these killers remained behind bars. It quickly passed the Legislature and became the very first bill to be signed by the Governor this year. While the State Supreme Court chose not to follow the exact intent of the Legislature, my bill ensures that future deadly assaults will result in felony murder convictions; it gives prosecutors the needed legal language to put violent criminals behind bars!

CONSTRUCTION BUDGET SAVES PARKS AND CREATES JOBS!

As chairman of the Senate Capital Budget Committee, I was tasked with writing our state’s “construction” budget. The \$2.57 billion capital budget is expected to create 13,400 construction related jobs over the next 24 months and 11,000 such jobs in the following two years. Rep. Orcutt, who serves on the House Capital Budget, also had an important role in its passage. Budget highlights include:

1. School safety money for mapping school buildings so that “first responders” such as police and firefighters will know the layout of our schools;
2. Increased funding for the Housing Trust Fund and affordable housing;
3. \$10 million for a new, state-of-the-art crime lab in Vancouver;
4. Increased funding for the Salmon Creek Park and the Cottonwood Beach Regional Park;
5. Continued financial support for the Columbia River Dredging project;
6. Continued funding for our state parks; not one state park will close this year because of a lack of funds!
7. \$350 million for construction of 876 high-security prison beds at Walla Walla prison.



Sen. Zarelli signs a banner and a Senate Resolution in support of our troops.

“SEMICONDUCTOR” BILL MEANS JOBS FOR CAMAS/WASHOUGAL

One of my most exciting achievements in my years as your state Senator took place when the Governor signed my “semiconductor” bill, SB 5725. I thank Reps. Mielke and Orcutt for helping pass this measure in the House.

This legislation authorizes tax incentives for the semiconductor industry, allowing WaferTech to build a \$3.5 billion plant in Clark County. More than ever, Southwest Washington needs the jobs and stability that a prominent company like WaferTech can bring. My legislation creates a suitable business atmosphere so WaferTech can expand here rather than going elsewhere. As a result, Washington will see \$250 million in new revenue while protecting 3,000 jobs statewide, each paying more than \$50,000 per year!

SEN. JOE ZARELLI

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Capital Budget, Chair
Ways & Means, Vice-chair
Economic Development, Vice-chair
Education, Vice-chair
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18TH DISTRICT REPORT

NEWS FROM REP. MIELKE

Each legislative session has its share of successes and disappointments. The 2003 session was no different. Our greatest success this year was to pass a balanced budget that funds essential services without increasing taxes.

MIELKE BILLS

Other successes included two bills I prime sponsored that were adopted by the Legislature and signed into law:

- **Juvenile driving privileges (HB 1416)** – Under current law, if you are convicted of driving under the influence, you could lose your license for a year. Juveniles, however, who are caught with alcohol, even though they weren't driving, could lose their license for two years for every violation. In some instances, they might not be able to get their driving privileges back until they are 25. This bill says that a juvenile's period of revocation shall not extend beyond his/her 21st birthday.
- **Commercial drivers physical exams (HB 1597)** – Eliminates the restriction that truck drivers cannot obtain or renew their commercial driver's license without showing proof of a physical exam. Drivers still must have a copy of a medical examiner's certificate stating their fitness to drive before being allowed to operate a commercial motor vehicle. This will allow out-of-work drivers to renew their licenses without having the immediate expense of paying for a physical exam.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM PORN

I've been very concerned about the reluctance of libraries to place Internet filters on public computers to protect children from pornography. For several years, I've sponsored a bill that would allow local library boards to be elected so that they are accountable to the voters – and so that we could get these protections in place. Although the bill has not advanced, the federal government has now stepped in with a law that withholds federal money from libraries that do not equip their public-access computers with filters blocking pornography.

Local libraries will need to make the decision to add the filters or lose federal funding. Our libraries need to be a safe place for our children to read and learn. It's my hope that this federal decision will prompt our local libraries to do the right thing and add the filters for the protection of our children.



Rep. Tom Mielke speaks with C-Tran Public Affairs Director Scott Patterson following a progress report on the 199th Street culvert project in Battle Ground.

THE UNNECESSARY I-5 HOV LANE: THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Nearly \$50 million was spent to widen I-5 to six lanes to cut congestion in Vancouver. However, not long afterward, one of the southbound lanes was designated HOV. So instead of getting the additional lane for congestion relief, it cost taxpayers \$50 million for only the use of a few cars on this lane. And the congestion continues.

It's what I call "political gridlocking." In simplified terms, light-rail advocates want to make congestion in this corridor so bad, eventually people will give up and turn our local land-use authority over to Portland. Portland would eventually have taxing authority, including for replacement of the I-5 Columbia River bridge to make it compatible for light rail. Bottom line – you pay big!

Wouldn't it be more simple and make more sense just to reopen those six lanes for all traffic and relieve the traffic congestion now? Do we really want to give up our voices to Portland?

This is a battle I will continue to fight and will continue to keep you informed.

REP. TOM MIELKE

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NEWS FROM REP. ORCUTT

REDUCING THE COST OF GOVERNMENT

Eliminating government paperwork frees up time and money that can be put toward serving more citizens. I introduced House Bill 1561 to eliminate a number of reports the Department of Social and Health Services was required to publish. The House and Senate gave it overwhelming approval. The information that would have been collected for the 15 reports affected will still be available – it just won't be automatically printed and distributed.

Also, I was disappointed that a citizens' commission decided to give legislators a 2 percent salary increase next year. After their decision I introduced a measure to give the Legislature authority to formally reject similar pay-increase decisions in the future. However, the 2003 session ended before we could consider the bill.

WATCHING OUT FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

I'm pleased to report the passage of House Bill 1095, which will give the many small timber landowners in our district some relief from the state's Forest and Fish Act. The act required those landowners to develop a "road maintenance and abandonment plan," which would have forced landowners to prepare a costly report – even if they were not using their roads. The cost and complexity of complying could have forced many landowners to convert their property to non-timber uses. HB 1095 clarifies the definitions of forest roads and forestland. Now, small forest landowners (those who harvest less than 2 million board feet of timber per year) need not develop an RMAP until they plan to harvest their timber. I believe it will help small forest landowners to continue growing trees – and protecting the environment.

Also, I proposed an amendment to the 2003-05 capital budget to make absolutely sure our small forest landowners who harvested timber are properly compensated for leaving trees as a buffer to protect salmon habitat. I wanted to uphold a commitment the Legislature made to these landowners when the Forests and Fish Act was adopted in 1999. My amendment was turned down, but the chairman of the House Capital Budget Committee promised in front of the entire House that my concern would be taken care of "at another time and another place."

DEFENDING TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR SENIORS

Seniors and physically disabled people should not lose their property tax exemption because cost-of-living increases bump their disposable income just over the income and property value standards. I introduced legislation (House Bill 1343) to require regular adjustments for inflation, and consider medical costs when figuring disposable income. Although my bill did not gain committee support, I will continue to pursue this much-needed relief.



Rep. Orcutt discusses support for education with HeadStart advocates from Cowlitz County.

REP. ED ORCUTT

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PROGRESS TOWARD A BETTER BUSINESS ‘CLIMATE’

The number of jobs that have disappeared from our state in the past few years is about equal to the population of Vancouver! That’s why creating jobs – and preserving the jobs we still have – is one of our top priorities for the 2003-05 legislative term.

To help in that effort, we passed legislation to reduce the cost of doing business in Washington and make our state more attractive to employers looking to expand.

Bringing fairness to workers’ compensation: Senate Bill 5271 will preserve medical benefits for injured workers, but could save up to \$200 million over the next two years alone, by reducing the number of hearing-loss claims being improperly charged to employers.

Overhauling the unemployment insurance (UI) system: Washington has the third-highest unemployment insurance cost in the nation. Many employers look at this cost when deciding whether to set up business in our state. Without reforms, we simply can’t compete. For example, unemployment taxes cost Boeing \$772 per worker per year. Compare that to California, which is \$394 less. Our state’s high-cost unemployment insurance system is a huge barrier that must be overcome if Washington is to remain a competitive place to do business and create jobs. We adopted legislation to reduce these costs and protect jobs in Washington.

WORKING TO LAND BOEING’S 7E7 JETLINER PROJECT

Our state needs every job it can get, which is just one of the reasons we want to see Washington win the national competition to become home to Boeing’s new 7E7 “Dreamliner” aircraft project.

We supported a package of significant tax incentives for Boeing (House Bill 2294), which will take effect *only* if the 7E7 work comes to Washington. However, we want to see other employers receive the same tax relief. Rep. Orcutt offered amendments to extend tax incentives to *all* employers, but a majority did not support them.

If we’re going to give tax incentives to Boeing, we should be prepared to offer tax incentives to all employers, not only to attract new business to our state, but also to keep the employers and jobs we already have. We should be ready next year to help all employers with the same kind of relief next year.

MORE FUNDING FOR KEY EDUCATION NEEDS

Teachers in Washington are paid based on a salary schedule set by the state. Education organizations have told us often the wages for beginning teachers were too low to attract people to the teaching profession, and that many young teachers are leaving the classroom early in their careers in favor of jobs that pay better.

To help balance the state’s operating budget, the governor suggested suspending the pay raises for teachers authorized by Initiative 732 – raises above and beyond the regular “step” increases available to teachers. However, the budget we adopted took the education community’s concerns into account and provided money to boost salaries for teachers with seven or fewer years’ experience.

Under the new budget, by the end of next year, the average annual salary for a teacher in Washington will be nearly \$46,000 – and every teacher will make at least \$30,000 per year.

The budget also includes \$30 million more for class-size reductions (Initiative 728) than the governor requested. The per-pupil grant will equal \$254 per student, compared to the \$212 proposed by Gov. Locke.

PRESERVING PUBLIC SAFETY

KEEPING SEX OFFENDERS FROM BEING HOUSED IN NEIGHBORHOODS

State law says that sex offenders who have completed the treatment program at the Special Commitment Center on McNeil Island may be released to community-based housing. When we heard that the Department of Corrections (DOC) was looking at placing these sex offenders in our local neighborhoods where families and children would be at risk, we put the brakes on that real fast. Instead, we convinced DOC to look at better alternatives, such as industrial sites, for transitional housing.

VANCOUVER TO GET NEW CRIME LAB

At one time, we thought we might lose the Washington State Patrol crime lab in Kelso. Instead, we were able to secure \$10 million for a new state-of-the-art crime lab in Vancouver. This will help in the investigations of crimes in Southwest Washington and throughout the state.

18TH DISTRICT REPORT

WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOU

There's an old saying about the sum of something being greater than the individual parts, and this year gave us several opportunities to show again how one legislative team is greater than three legislators individually. By coordinating our efforts, we were able to speak with one voice on issues that are vital to our district and use our committee positions and years of experience in Olympia to push for solutions. This cooperation was instrumental in obtaining passage of the WaferTech bill, approving money for public facilities (like a new WSP crime lab) and making sure transportation projects came to Clark and Cowlitz counties, not just to the Seattle area. Pooling our resources to produce this report is just another way of working together efficiently.

While the 2003 session produced some significant accomplishments, the 2004 session isn't far off – and with it will come another round of budget and policy challenges. You can count on us to work as a team once again to represent your interests, and those of your neighbors across the 18th District, in the coming year.

TOLL - FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:
1-800-562-6000

**LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION
ON THE INTERNET:**
www.leg.wa.gov

**STATE GOVERNMENT
ON THE INTERNET:**
www.access.wa.gov

SENIORS – JOIN US SEPT. 27 TO TALK ABOUT NEW PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROGRAMS

After years of work and debating numerous proposals in both the House and Senate, the Legislature agreed on prescription-drug legislation this year. The bill creates a list of “preferred drugs” and is supposed to lead to price discounts for qualified people who are 50 or older and do not have prescription drug coverage otherwise.

Seniors in our communities are invited to informational meetings Sept. 27 to learn about obtaining medications at reduced cost through pharmaceutical company programs. We'll be there to answer questions, as will representatives from the pharmaceutical companies involved.

10 A.M. – NOON

Washougal Community Room
1701 C Street

1:30 – 4 P.M.

Battle Ground Senior Citizens Center
116 Northeast Third Avenue

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**SEN. JOE ZARELLI
REP. TOM MIELKE
REP. ED ORCUTT**

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